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ABSTRACT

"Adult competence" and "productivity" can be viewed as interactive terms on the same continuum; as the definition of one term expands, so does the definition of the other. For example, while productivity may once have meant simply the efficient production of goods and services, it now encompasses a much vaster dimension, including such factors as respect for the environment, conservation of energy, and the development of the individual. To meet such productivity goals, adults need many more competencies than just job skills. This interaction has two principal implications for competency-based adult education: it fosters in the student the increasing capacity to learn (how to learn, not just learning what is being taught); competency-based adult educators have a responsibility to understand and support human competence in its broadest sense. These implications lead to the following two action steps that competency-based adult educators should take: (1) they should research, develop, and implement competency-based developmental education for all adults in order to encourage lifelong learning; and (2) competency-based adult educators should take leadership roles in a philosophical quest for the meaning of human and adult competency. These are challenges for the future of competency-based adult education. (KC)

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ADULT COMPETENCE: THE KEY TO PRODUCTIVITY

Paul V. Delker

Conference addresses fall into two categories: those in which you are told the area to be addressed, and those in which you are permitted to choose your theme. This invitation fell into the latter category and I chose "Adult Competency: The Key To Productivity" because I find it provocative. It evokes a series of important questions.

To begin with it evokes the question: What do we mean by "adult competence"? Is it synonomous with such terms as "human effectiveness," "personal empowerment," and "the development of the individual." Or does it simply refer to sets of competencies adults find themselves needing in recurring cultural environments, in this context the work and economic environment?

Next, what do we mean by "productivity"? Are we talking simply about the efficient production of goods and services or does the term hold more profound connotations embracing all human values in a harmonious heiracrchy manifested by such achievements as peace - both personal and societal; the eradication of hunger and the furtherance of human health; conservation; the effective use of resources in a sharing world?

And finally, it raises a series of questions about the relationships between the two meanings of adult competence on the one hand and productivity on the other. Are these concepts fully compatable or do they contain antitheses: That is, is a productive person by the very nature of the case a competent adult and is a competent adult by definition a productive person? Or, does the concept of productivity imply a surrendering of certain adult competencies in favor of those demanded by the larger society?

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Address delivered to the Seventh National Conference on Competency Based Adult Education, San Antonio, Texas, November 12, 1982.

Obviously, I cannot treat all of these questions today. One or more of them taken alone might require more time than we have here today. But I raise them because I think we as adult educators must continually think about them, and I do want to touch upon some of them, though not in depth, as germaine to our purposes today.

What I do propose to do is to give some preliminary clarification to the terms of "adult competence" and "productivity," briefly cite the emerging social consciousness about the relationship of the two, and suggest some hypothoses, principles and action steps for the future.

First, I think it is legitimate to use the two terms "adult competence" and "productivity" in both a restricted and a global sense. In the global sense, the term adult competence is perhaps synonomous with such terms as "human effectiveness." And, in the global sense, "productivity" must include an ordering of human values and a synthesis of those with the order and rhythm of the world, both the man-made world and the cosmos.

In the most restricted sense, "adult competence" includes only those skills and behaviors necessary to achieve a short term result. And correspondingly, in the most restricted sense "productivity" means nothing more than the most efficient achievement of a short term economic result.

Between these extremes there is an almost infinite range of increasingly larger senses of both terms, so that both terms admit of an uninterrupted ordered sequence--continuums, if you like.

Let me illustrate this continuum by choosing a point somewhere in-between the narrow, restricted senses of the terms and the global senses.

First, take "to be productive" or "productivity" to mean cost-beneficial. This is a broader meaning of productivity than the historically earlier notion of cost-effective. Cost-effective in its early usage meant "does it pay off." Is it cost effective to produce a solar water heater for $1500 if it has a useful life of 15 years? Cost effective always includes the question: Compared to what? Cost-beneficial, on the other hand moves down the continuum towards the global sense and would say: Whether it is cost-effective (i.e. cheaper than alternative methods of and sources for heating water) is not the right question. It is cost-beneficial because it preserves resources, does not pollute and uses a naturally renewable resource.

Now, let us take the term "adult competence" as it can be applied to the economic context. An adult economic role is that of consumer.

The APL study contained more items relating to adult consumer competency than any other area. Those items contained some embedded assumptions about adult consumer competence. Recall the celebrated item about which cereal was the best buy.* This was a point along the continuum of adult competence clearly beyond the competence to buy cereal purely on taste, impuse or according to the bonus surprise toy which one box might contain. A notion which would go considerably beyond the APL unit-pricing notion of adult competence might require

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*In this item, the adult was presented 3 ficticious brands of cereal, each of different package-size and price and asked to determine which was the best buy.

reading the nutritional analysis on the side of each box and establishing which had the greatest food value conducive to maintaining health. It is important to note that if one assumes this more extensive notion of adult competence — farther down the continuum — the "correct" answer may very well not be the cheapest cereal per ounce.

In the APL item, the competency being measured assumed that a competent adult must be able to unit-price shop. That is certainly true and legitimate. But if we move down the continuum of adult competency and say that the responsibility to maintain health must be a factor in pricing the unit, we require a whole new set of competencies, knowledge of nutritional elements, relationship of health maintenance to nutritional intake, nutritional assimilation, and perhaps even the re-education of taste. And as I have already said, with the introduction of this notion of adult competence, we have very likely changed the scoring key on which is the correct answer.

Industrial society has moved from the narrowest use of productivity and the narrowest view of competence to a broader view of both terms as they are most commonly used today. By way of illustration I only need to cite the child labor abuses and sub-human working conditions of the 19th and early 20th centuries which for decades have been prohibited by law. This notion of productivity viewed human beings as consumables in the production of goods. Contrast these with a recent ad in the October 18, 1982 Fortune and the November-December issue of the Harvard Business Review. These ads are sponsored by the American Society for Training Development, the association in this country most representative of corporate executives responsible for training and developing adults in the work force. In the Fortune ad, the lead is "Human Capital: A High Yield Corporate Investment."

A far cry from child labor and slave shop concepts of productivity' The HBR lead is "Investing in America's Workforce: The Key to Productivity." (Incidentally, I chose the title of this address about six weeks before I knew about these ads. This coincidence of terminology is probably additional evidence of the emerging consciousness in our times of the need to broaden both our meaning of productivity and our meaning of adult competence.)

This movement in our consciousness in the economic dimension is summarized by Eli Ginzberg in a September 1982 article "The Mechanization of Work," in Scientific American. I quote:

> Some economists have come to appreciate that the key to economic progress lies less with the accumulation of physical capital and more with the broadening and deepening of human capital, since it is human talent alone that is capable of inventing, adapting and maintaining machines.
>
> These observations lead me to my first hypothosis.
>
> Hypothosis 1: A broadened sense of productivity, by the very nature of the case, includes a broadened sense of adult competence.

Some years ago, when economists realized that an artist who gives pleasure to thousands, a surgeon who restores the health of hundreds, or a person who manages the home of a family, must be considered productive, they not only broadened their scales of productivity. They also broadened their view of what it means to be competent. In effect, by broadening their notions of productivity they gave new legitimacy in the market place to a host of additional adult competencies.

Today's technolgical society embodies a concept of productivity that is qualitatively different from that concept in previous times. In 1820 more than 70 percent of the labor force worked on the farm. By 1900 fewer than 40 percent were engaged in agriculture. By the 1930's more than half the U.S. labor force had shifted from the production of goods to providing services. Today's employment in the services is approaching the same 70 percent that were bound to the soil in 1820. Only 32 percent of the labor force are still engaged in the production of goods and most of these are in manufacturing. Today, a mere 3 percent are employed in agriculture.

Between 1940 and 1980 employment in service occupations grew from 46 percent of total employment to 68 percent. Of all new jobs added to the economy from 1969 to 1976, 90 percent were in services.

The qualitative change in the concept of productivity can perhaps best be understood by viewing the shifts between 1940 and 1980 among white collar workers, blue-collar workers, and service sector workers (narrowly defined as those who provide services primarily to consumers).

	White Collar	Blue Collar	Service-Sector
1940	31%	57%	12%
1980	54% (+23%)	34% (-23%)	12%

Note that during this 40 year period the figures almost interchanged. In 1980 we were only 3 percentage points away from white collar jobs being the same percentage of total jobs that blue collar jobs were in 1940.

What are the implications of this qualitative change in productivity and these shifts in types of work available in relation to adult competency requirements in the workplace? One indicator is the educational achievements of the younger

members of the workforce, the 25-29 year olds. In 1940 one in sixteen in this age group had either an undergraduate degree or a higher degree. In 1980, the ratio was almost one in four.

Today, we must add the factors of computers, robotics and high technology to the traditional shift of jobs from blue collar to white collar. Today's white collar jobs require a much higher set of competencies than those of the 1940's. The machines and computers invented, improved and put into operation throughout the economy depend on a steady accretion in the pool of knowledge and on the availability of enough technicians.

It is this set of realities that leads Eli Ginzberg to write in the article already cited: "An increasingly white-collar economy has no place for functional illiterates."

The broadened sense of productivity that has envolved so dramatically during the past 40 years carries with it, according to Hypothosis 1, a broadened sense of adult competence, both in the world of work and in the world beyond the world of work.

A corollary follows which I will express as Hypothosis 2:

> Hypothosis 2: A broadened sense of human competence generates pressure for a broadened sense of productivity.

> Discussions about the "Quality of Life," acceptance by the general public of the importance of parenting competencies, competencies in conserving and sheparding resources, and a host of other public discussions imply and frequently result in a broadened societal concept of adult or human competence. These in turn, frequently result in a broadened sense of productivity.

The point emerges that these notions of adult competence and productivity are highly interactive. Let me illustrate this first in terms of Hypothesis 1, that a broadened sense of productivity includes a broadened sense of adult competence.

In the industrial 30's and 40's our notion of productivity was cost-efficient production of goods. Managers in those days were not required to be competent about or to figure into their costs the effects of the industry on the environment, the cost of pollution control devices or product safety design. And relatively little was required in the area of worker safety.

Today's notion of productivity requires all these competencies and more. Entire industries now exist in support of worker safety equipment and design and product safety. The expansion of the notion of productivity significantly broadened our universe of adult competencies.

Now, let us look at this interaction from the point of Hypothesis 2, that a broadened sense of human competence generates pressure for a broadened sense of productivity.

Recall the social analysis and human concern literature of the last 40 years. Select any number of titles: From Silent Spring to Small is Beautiful; from The Lonely Crowd to New Rules. Hundreds could be sighted which focused on human values, what they are, how they are to be realized, and what they mean in an improved social order. Over time, this body of literature and the dialogues it generated expanded our concensus about what it means to be a competent person, a competent adult. It changed our concept of a competent adult from that of unconscious consumer of resources to a consuming preserver of resources; from a patient-treatment notion of health to a health-maintenance notion. It demanded that those in the production and market places be held responsible — and thus become competent — in preserving lives, the environment, and in improving the quality of life.

This expanded notion of adult competency required that we change our notion of productivity, that productivity include the notions of life and environmental preservation.

Some say that this expanded view of productivity puts us in an unfair competitive position vis-a-vis other countries. Others say, however, that this is too simplistic a view. They say, in effect, that our expanded concept of productivity is broader than our analysis and reporting of productivity. Let me again quote Eli Ginzberg at some length from the source previously cited.

> The available statistics suggest that on a per capita basis the U.S. is close to its long-term trend in gross domestic product (G.D.P.): the output of all domestically produced goods and services. The unease centers on the recent sharp decline in productivity (measured as the ratio of total production to units of labor input). Any interpretation, however, is plagued by complications: the reported hours of work overstate the actual hours worked, exaggerating the measured declines in productivity; the U.S. economy has been shifting rapidly from goods

> to services, a shift that inadequately reflects the increases in output; the statistics also fail to adequately reflect changes in quality, investments in the public sector and what is happening outside the market, notably in the "underground economy" and in the household. If one were to understand and take proper account of these developments, the performance of the U.S. economy would probably be better, and possibly much better, than the current statistics suggest. Americans may well be unduly worried over a phenomenon that reveals more about the limitations of economic analysis and statistical reporting than about the economy itself.

Thus, I think we can see the validity of Hypotheses 1 and 2 and also see somewhat the dynamic interaction of broadening either our concept of what it means to be competent or what it means to be productive.

> For my own part, I hold that this action and reaction between concepts of productivity and competence, between how we equate the delivery of goods and services with the development of adult or human competence, is one of the most constructive modern mechanisms for human and social change. Although we would wish for a more rapid and more comprehensive method, the productivity/competence interactive continuums provide for periodic adjustments between broadened concepts of human competence and economic progress.

> So much for discussions of the concepts of adult competence and productivity. What have these to do with adult educators, and particulary competency-based adult educators?

Let us analyze for a few minutes what the implications of hypothoses 1 and 2 are for comptency-based adult educators.

In the first place, to promote competency-based adult learning says that the educator knows something about what it means to be a competent person, what some of these competencies are, and how to go about acquiring these in an effective manner, and in a manner that in itself enhances and extends the competence of the person, as person. I repeat that last, in a manner that in itself enhances and extends the competence of the person as person.

This means that the very act of acquiring competencies leaves the person more competent, not just in those prescribed competencies sought, but in the person's actual ability to take charge of her or his own life and destiny. Without this dimension, I submit, we are trainers not educators, and we would be limited to being reactors under hypothosis 1. Our understanding of what it means to be a competent adult would only be in reaction to a broadened definition of productivity.

This leads me to a statement of a Principle which I will call Principle 1:

> Principle 1: CBAE fosters in the learner the increasing capacity to learn.

Some of the terms of this principle bear amplification. The phrase "increasing capacity of the person to learn" assumes that no one has the developed capability to always learn from each opportunity what it is humanly possible to learn. And by

> "to learn" I do not mean just, not even predominantly, the acquisition of more competencies of the type being sought. Nor do I mean "to learn" only in structured or directed settings nor in those guided or directed by an educator whether that educator is proximate or remote. Rather here I mean by "to learn," the increasing ability to respond to every human predicament — planned or unexpected, routine or crisis, initiated or imposed — as a learner; the ability to distill from every encounter a new competence including the competence to learn and an increased capability to learn.

Let us pause here a moment and ask, "How is the adult education program doing on Principle 1"? Well, the complete answer is "We don't know." But the partial answer is: "There are encouraging signs." The first sign is data systematically acquired in the 1980 Development Associates evaluation of the Adult Education Program.

In a national sample of participants queried, 84% reported they thought better about themselves. This response surpassed all others. 75% reported they could read better, which is the competence overwhelmingly sought and taught in the structured program. Combined with my own observation of the program over a 16 year period, I attach great importance to this phenomenon. It is to me an encouraging sign that 84% cited feeling better about themselves. While this is not synonomous with "an increasing capacity to learn," it is a sine qua non of learning.

People who are depressed or preoccupied with "I'm not O.K." feelings are not able to learn. Learning requires going out of oneself and taking in the new knowledge, the new competence. To do this, one must feel reasonably good about oneself.

Another good sign, I think, is the success of the program in terms of what it is designed to do. The 1980 evaluation also confirmed this. People are learning. And this 7th National CBAE Conference is a further sign that Principle 1 is operative, albeit incompletely.

Returning to the implications of Hypothoses 1 and 2, I come to a 2nd principle:

> Principle 2: Competency-based adult educators have a responsibility to understand and support human competence in its broadest sense.

I have already said that we are trainers and not educators if our understanding of adult competence is simply a reaction to a recently expanded definition of productivity. To be educators — especially competency - based adult educators — we too must be learners, and especially students of what it means to be a competent adult. If a broadened sense of human competence generates pressure for a broadened sense of productivity, those who lead in understanding and supporting human competence in its broadest sense will ultimately influence society's view of economic considerations.,

I find it difficult to conceive of a more meaningful or exciting challenge. And if not us, who? If our society cannot look to those who professionally affiliate under the title of Competency Based Adult Educators, do they not have a right to expect that our notion of human or adult competence is the captive of our definition of productivity?

I seem wedded to duo's today. I have given you two hypothoses, two principles, and now I will close with two Action Steps.

My first action step relates to what Community Colleges call "Developmental Education." This term encompasses those skills, knowledge and dispositions required to be a lifelong learner. I like the term and the thesis that the mission of the adult educator is to assist all adults in becoming lifelong learners. Thus

Action Step 1: - Competency Based Adult Educators should systematically research, develop, and implement Competency Based Developmental Education for all adults.

I have already said that fragmentary data indicates we may be doing a fairly good job of Developmental Education under programs supported by the Adult Education Act. But it is intuitive, and perhaps unintended. It needs to be better understood and more systematically and reliably installed.

If you succeed in this, I don't need to point out the impact you will have on elementary and secondary education in the country.

But let me hasten to point out that in this Action Step I am not talking just about Developmental Education for undereducated adults. I am talking about it for all adults including those in the advanced ranks of the professions and in high technology. Through such an effort, you would simultaneously expand the meanings of adult competency and of productivitiy. Of course, I am suggesting a long-range undertaking, at least as long-range as the seven years invested by CBAE to date. But there is no more important work to be done by educators and those needed to join with us.

Action Step 2 - Competency Based Adult Educators should take leadership in a philosophical quest of the meaning of human and adult competency.

If my exposition of Principle 2 was effective, you will take this action. I view it as your highest professional responsibility in the philosophical realm. To assume the responsibility of being a Competency Based Educator is, I submit,

to assume the responsibility for leading the quest for understanding adult and human competency. In our interactive world there is no more important and probably no more urgent need. I would be happy to join with you in this exploration.

Principle 2 says it is as important for us to be as knowledgeable about the body of human concern and social analysis literature as about our emerging field of competency-based learning. This means it is as important to read Aristotle and and Yankolovich, to name only two, as it is to read the literature of our field. For philosophy and the literature of social concern is where many of issues about human and adult competency are treated.

The Adult Competency-Based movement was born in a climate of concern about what it means to be humanly competent. At the same time the APL project sought to provide a basis for operationizing the concept of adult competence, the Future of Adult Education project at Syracuse and the Rutgers State of the Art Research Project sought to deal with the broader issues of human and adult competence. The projects were brought together several times to deal with common issues of adult competence. I especially recommend a re-reading — for many of you a first reading for the work has not been widely available — of Warren Ziegler's work on Civic Literacy.

There is a tradition in CBAE for being leaders in thinking through the profound issues encompassed in the notion of adult competence. I wage you to maintain and extend this tradition.

Finally, let me express a hote. I hope you will consider designing the Eighth Competency Based Education Conference around these two action steps. Philosophers and social scientists need to join with you in the philosophical quest. In order to systematically implement Competency-Based Developmental Education for all adults, knowledge must be exchanged, research agendas must be built, programs must be designed and carried forth. Such activities readily lend themselves to a conference format.

The decisions are yours. They are as challenging as that which was before us the first Conference seven years ago. They are the challanges of a profession which has come of age. Congratulations and Godspeed.